

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 SSC-01 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 TRSE-00
OMB-01 AGRE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00
CU-02 INT-05 IO-13 AID-05 /102 W
-----002276 201855Z /45

O R 201733Z JUL 77
FM AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4515
INFO AMEMBASSY ACCRA
AMEMBASSY BAMAKO
AMEMBASSY COTONOU
AMEMBASSY DAKAR
AMEMBASSY LOME
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NIAMEY
AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU
AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ABIDJAN 7203

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, IV
SUBJECT: IVORIAN CABINET CHANGES: FIRST REACTIONS

REFERENCE: (A) ABIDJAN 7185 (B) ABIDJAN 7186

BEGIN SUMMARY: SWEEPING CHANGES IN IVORIAN GOVERNMENT CONFIRM
MOST, THOUGH NOT ALL, THE RUMORS WHICH HAVE BEEN CIRCULATING
IN ABIDJAN IN RECENT MONTHS. ALTHOUGH CHANGES ARE DRASTIC,
AND INVOLVE SEVERAL KEY FIGURES, EMBASSY DOES NOT BELIEVE THE
RESHUFFLE SUGGESTS MAJOR SHIFTS IN POLICY, FOREIGN OR DOMESTIC,
AS PRESIDENT HOUPHOUET ASSURED THE AMBASSADOR ON JULY 19. CHANGES
APPEAR MOTIVATED BY DESIRE TO ROOT OUT CORRUPTION AND IN SOME
INSTANCES INEFFICIENCY, TO STREAMLINE GOVERNMENT AND MAKE ROOM
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FOR NEW PERSONALITIES. TRIBAL AND REGIONAL CONSIDERATIONS WERE
APPARENTLY NOT OF SIGNIFICANT IMPORTANCE. END SUMMARY.

1. DEPARTURES OF FOUR BEST KNOWN IVORIAN MINISTERS -- USHER
FROM FOREIGN AFFAIRS, KONAN BEDIE FROM FINANCE, DIAWARA FROM
PLAN, AND SAWADOGO FROM AGRICULTURE -- HAVE BEEN TALKED ABOUT
FOR SOME TIME, BUT COME AS A SHOCK NEVERTHELESS. USHER, TO

BEST OUR KNOWLEDGE, HAS BEEN UNTOUCHED BY CHARGES OF CORRUPTION. HIS DISMISSAL IS PROBABLY DUE TO TIME IN GRADE (SINCE 1966) AND WEIGHT (HE IS GARGANTUANLY FAT). ALTHOUGH HIS MINISTRY IS NOTORIOUSLY INEFFICIENT, USHER HIMSELF IS A HIGHLY INTELLIGENT AND OCCASIONALLY PROFOUND PERSON, WIDELY RESPECTED IN IVORY COAST AND ABROAD. HE REMAINS CHARMAN OF THE PDCI COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION, AND REPORTEDLY REFUSED THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, WHICH HE MAY HAVE REGARDED AS A DOWNGRADING. HIS SUCCESSOR, UN AMBASSADOR SIMEON AKE, IS WELL-DISPOSED TO THE U.S., CLOSE TO HOUPHOUET BUT LIGHTER WEIGHT THAN USHER (BOTH MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY). FOREIGN POLICY WILL CONTINUE TO BE MADE BY HOUPHOUET, HOWEVER, AND AKE'S ENERGY MAY CONTRIBUTE TO THE MINISTRY'S EFFECTIVENESS.

2. MOST SURPRISING IS KONAN BEDIE, FIRST IVORIAN AMBASSADOR TO THE U.S. AND MINISTER OF FINANCE SINCE 1970. HE HAS BEEN AN ABLE FINANCE MINISTER, THOUGH WIDELY KNOWN FOR CORRUPTION AND OFTEN CALLED "HENRY TEN (OR FIFTEEN) PERCENT." NEVERTHELESS, HE IS NATIONALLY POPULAR, TRIBALLY AND POLITICALLY INFLUENTIAL, AND THOUGHT TO HAVE SPECIAL TIES WITH HOUPHOUET (SOME RUMORS EVEN SUGGEST HE IS AN ILLEGITIMATE SON). HE REPLACEMENT, ABDOULAYE KONE, IS YOUNG (42), BRIGHT AND ENERGETIC AND WAS NAMED TO NEW BUDGET MINISTRY LAST YEAR APPARENTLY IN AN EFFORT TO CUT DOWN KONAN BEDIE'S OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRAFT. WHETHER HE CAN TAKE BEDIE'S PLACE, TOGETHER WITH ENORMOUS ADDED RESPONSIBILITY OF MINISTRY OF PLAN, REMAINS TO BE SEEN.

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3. SAWADOGO AND DIAWARA HAVE BOTH BEEN CHARGED WITH CORRUPTION, ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE ALSO BEEN AMONG THE MOST EFFECTIVE MEMBERS OF THE GOIC. BOTH ARE OF NONIVORIAN ORIGIN (DIAWARA IS VOLTAIC AND SAWADOGO MALIAN) AND HAVE LITTLE POLITICAL CLOUT, BUT THEIR TECHNICAL ABILITY WILL BE SORELY MISSED. BRA KONAN, NEW MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, HAS BEEN IN MINISTRY FOR MANY YEARS AND HAS LONG HANKERED AFTER THE TOP JOB. HE PROBABLY HAS MUCH TO LEARN ABOUT INTERNATIONAL COMMODITY AFFAIRS, FOR WHICH SAWADOGO ENJOYS A WORLD REPUTATION.

4. MATHIEU EKRA, FORMERLY INTERIOR MINISTER, HAS BEEN SOMEWHAT ECLIPSED IN PAST YEAR, THOUGH STILL A POLITICAL POWER. HE APPOINTMENT AS MINISTER FOR REFORM OF STATE SOCIETIES (WHICH WE ASSUME HAS TO DO WITH CORRUPTION) MAY MEAN AN INCREASING ROLE FOR HIM.

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5. OTHER CHANGES APPEAR LARGELY REDUCTION OF SUPERFLUOUS
MINISTRIES AND REMOVAL OF MARGINAL PERFORMERS. HIS NEA
IN CULTURE WAS NOT EFFECTIVE, AND HIS REPLACEMENT BERNARD
DADIE IS IVORY COAST'S BEST KNOWN AUTHOR, POET AND
PLAYWRIGHT. LOUA DIOMANDE HAS BEEN AILING AND HIS
MINISTRY OF STATE IS STRICTLY HONORIFIC. KAUL MELEDJE
HAS BEEN USED FOR MEETING AND GREETING, AND HIS MINISTRY
OF COOPERATION ALMOST WITHOUT DISCERNABLE PURPOSE. YAO
KOUMAN IN SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND DACOURY TABLEY IN PROTECTION
OF NATURE HAVE BEEN INEFFECTIVE AND, LIKE MELEDJE, PROBABLY
OWED THEIR CABINET POSITIONS TO REGIONAL OR TRIBAL
CONSIDERATIONS. MINISTER OF LABOR VANIE BI TRA'S NEW
ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR IVORIANIZATION COMES AS A
MILD SURPRISE, SINCE HE HAS BEEN MUCH CRITICIZED FOR
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INEFFECTIVENESS IN HIS PRESENT CAPACITY. IVORIANIZATION
WAS TO HAVE BEEN ONE OF THE OBJECTIVES OF THE RESHUFFLE, AND
SLOWNESS IN IMPLEMENTATION OF IT MAY IN PART ACCOUNT FOR
SAWADOGO AND DIAWARA BEING DISMISSED.

6. RESHUFFLE ALSO INCLUDES SEVERAL SURPRISES AMONG MINISTERS

WHO ARE REMAINING. M'BAHIA BLE, IN DEFENSE SINCE 1966, WAS
TARRED WITH CORRUPTION BRUSH AND THOUGH TO BE UNPOPULAR
WITH THE OFFICER CORPS, BUT HAS KEPT HIS JOB AND EVEN MOVED
UP IN THE PRECEDENCE PECKING ORDER. COMMERCE MINISTER SERI
GNOLEBA WAS EXPECTED TO LEAVE IN CONNECTION WITH CORRUPTION
CHARGES DURING THE RICE SHORTAGE BUT WILLSTAY ON. AKOTO
YAO REMAINS IN EDUCDLION DESVITE HIS FLAMBOYANT AND
EXTRAVAGANT LIFESTYLE. AND BANGALI KNONE HAD BEEN THOUGHT
READY TO LEAVE THE PTT, IN PART BECAUSE OF A HIGHLY
QUESTIONABLE CONTRACT AWARD TO A FRENCH FIRM
(OVER AN AMERICAN LOW BIDDER) LAST FALL.

7. CONCLUSION: HOUPHOUET HAS TAKEN AN US UNUSUALLYDRASTIC MEASURE
IN PICKING HIS FOUR TOP LIEUTENANTS IN INTERNATIONAL FIELD.
OFFICIALS OF OTHER GOVERNMENTS AS WELL AS PRIVATETRADERS
AND INVESTORS WILL MISS THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE.
HOUPHOUET CLEARLY DECIDED, HOWEVER, THAT CORRUPTION AT
HIGH LEVELS HAD REACHED THE POINT WHERE CHANGES HAD TO
BE MADE, EVEN AT THE COST OF CREATING MISGIVINGS IN THE
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY WHERE USHER, KONAN BEDIE, DIAWARA
AND SAWADOGO WERE WIDELY KNOWN AND RESPECTED. REPLACEMENTS
FOR USHER AND SAWADOGO ARE BY NO MEANS INEXPERIENCED, AND
KNONE, WHO BECOMES A KEY FIGURE, HAS SHOWN HIMSELF INTELLIGENT
AND ENERGETIC. CHANGES WILL CERTAINLY BE POPULAR DOMESTI-
CALLY AND WILL DEMONSTRATE BOTH AT HOME AND ABROAD THAT
HOUPHOUET REMAINS VERY MUCH IN CHARGE. THE LATTER POINT
WILL TO SOME EXTENT RELIEVE FOREIGN, ESPECIALLY FRENCH
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ANXIETIES, ALTHOUGH IT IS INTERESTING THAT WHEN AMBASSADOR
SAW FRENCH AMBASSADOR RAPHAEL-LEGUES SHORTLY AFTER CHANGES
WERE ANNOUNCED, RAPHAEL-LEGUES EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT
THE DEPARTURE OF KONAN BEDIE, DIAWARA AND SAWADOGO. "THEY
WORKED FIFTEEN HOURS A DAY AND ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR MUCH
OF THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE IVORY COAST IN THE LAST TEN
YEARS," HE SAID. "WE WILL HAVE TO SEE WHETHER OTHERS
CAN DO AS WELL." IT IS A QUESTION THAT WILL TAKE TIME
TO ANSWER AND WHICH, IN THE END, MAY BE ANSWERED
DIFFERENTLY BY HOUPHOUET AND THE FRENCH. STEARNS

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